

CHALLENGES OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH FROM A DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: In this article, we develop a critical reflection on the challenges of educational research from a decolonial perspective. We argue at the outset that the decolonial epistemological turn present in the growing set of Latin American, Brazilian, and Amazonian academic production in the field of education needs to be accompanied by a methodological turn, which possesses an inventive and transgressive capacity in the processes of knowledge production. We use as theoretical sources contributions of decolonial thinking, black feminist epistemologies, popular education, participatory action-research, and other counter-hegemonic thinking paradigms. We analyze, in particular, the need to overcome the pedagogical coloniality and eurocentrism present in universities and in traditional processes of knowledge production; the construction of a participatory perspective and a political-transformative commitment to the social and educational realities investigated; the need to research education in dialogue with the experiences lived by subalternized subjects – their memories, ancestral elements, and wisdoms. Among the challenges pointed out, we also propose the incorporation of sensitivity and ethical commitment in the investigations, the assumption of corporeality in the processes of knowledge production, the construction of sensitive and decolonial writing and the adoption of intersectionality as a methodological perspective of decolonial research.

RESUMO: Neste artigo, desenvolvemos uma reflexão crítica sobre os desafios da pesquisa em educação em perspectiva decolonial. Parte do argumento de que o giro epistemológico decolonial presente em conjunto crescente da produção acadêmica latino-americana, brasileira e amazônica no campo da educação precisa estar acompanhado de um giro metodológico, que possupõe uma capacidade inventiva e transgressora nos processos de produção do conhecimento. Utilizamos como fontes teóricas aportes do pensamento decolonial, das epistemologias feministas negras, da educação popular, da investigação-ação participativa e outros paradigmas de pensamento contra-hegemônicos. Analisamos, em particular, a necessidade de superação da colonialidade pedagógica e do eurocentrismo presentes nas universidades e nos processos tradicionais de produção do conhecimento; a construção de uma perspectiva participativa e um compromisso político-transformador em face das realidades sociais e educacionais investigadas; a necessidade de se pesquisar a educação em diálogo com as experiências vividas por sujeitos subalternizados, suas memórias, ancestralidades e sabedorias. Dentre os desafios apontados, também se propõe a incorporação da sensibilidade e o compromisso ético nas investigações, a assunção da corporeidade nos processos de produção do conhecimento, a construção de uma escrita sensível e decolonial e a adoção da interseccionalidade como perspectiva metodológica das pesquisas decoloniais.

Keywords: Research in Education. Decoloniality. Intellectual colonialism.

Introduction

The academic production known as “decolonial” (despite its genealogy being linked to the epistemic practices of denouncing colonialism and coloniality both present in the colonized populations’ resistance movements since the beginning of the Conquest) begins to self-refer as this term at the late 1990s and early 2000s by Latin American intellectuals linked to the “Latin American modernity/coloniality research

program” (Escobar, 2003). This program proposed a radical break with Eurocentric models of knowledge production, or a “decolonial turn”, understood, according to Maldonado-Torres (2007), as a change of perspective and attitude that is found in colonized subjects’ practices and forms of knowledge, and also as a project of systematic and global transformation of the assumptions and implications of modernity, taken on by a variety of subjects in dialogue.

This production initially circulates in the Andean countries, mobilized by Latin American intellectuals in the field of Philosophy and Social Sciences, some of whom were diasporized in the United States and, thus, this production had little influence on the Brazilian academy at this first moment.

It is at the turn of the first decade of the 2000s to the second that the decolonial perspective begins to be more present in Brazilian academic debates, and the field of Education has been one of the spaces in which decolonial thinking is being appropriated and recreated with greater enthusiasm.

Although many of the questions raised by intellectuals of the so-called “modernity/coloniality network” were already present in Latin American critical production prior to its emergence, we agree with Maldonado-Torres (2019) that one of the potentialities that brought decoloniality as a concept was offering two key reminders – “first, colonization and its various dimensions remain clear on the fight’s horizon; second, it serves as a constant reminder that the logic and legacies of colonialism may continue to exist even after the end of formal colonization and the achievement of economic and political independence” (p. 28). It is in this perspective that research or theoretical essays made in the field of Education have appropriated these “key reminders”, applying them to the investigated educational phenomena.

Without claiming, in this text, to locate the origin of decolonial debates in the field of Education in Brazil, we maintain, based on surveys in databases such as *Scielo*, *Google Scholar*, and *Portal de Periódicos da CAPES*, that at least three research groups, located in different states of Brazil, have been playing an important role in the dissemination of the decolonial perspective in Education and its reinvention based on the Brazilian educational reality. These Research Groups are: “Mediações Pedagógicas e Cidadania” (UNISINOS), in Rio Grande do Sul; the “Grupo de Pesquisas sobre Cotidiano, Educação e Cultura(s)” (PUC-Rio), in Rio de Janeiro; and the “José Veríssimo e o Pensamento Educacional Latino-Americano” (UFPA), in Pará.

In Rio Grande do Sul state, at least since 2009, we have found research that is located at this intersection between education and decoloniality. Examples of this production are Streck; Adams and Moretti (2009) on education and emancipatory processes in Latin America; Adams and Streck (2010) on popular education and new technologies; Moretti and Adams (2011) on participatory research and popular education; Streck and Adams (2012) on research and education, social movements and epistemological reconstruction in a context of coloniality; Streck and Moretti (2013) on coloniality and insurgency in Latin American pedagogy, among others. In common, we notice that these authors’ focuses of interest are on popular education, participatory research, and Latin American pedagogical thinking, in dialogue with the decolonial perspectives.

In Rio de Janeiro state, the first two articles published on decolonial education/pedagogy in journals are from 2010 (Oliveira and Candau, 2010; Candau and Russo, 2010). In the first text, the authors

explicitly address the theme of decolonial pedagogy in its relations with anti-racist and intercultural education in Brazil, and in the second, the authors discuss interculturality and education in Latin America, with theoretical support in concepts of decolonial thinking. Even before these articles in journals, Oliveira and Lins (2007) published a paper in the proceedings of the *I Encontro de História da Educação do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (2007)* on the presence-absence of African history in History curricula of universities in this State. In common, these articles emphasize the debate on anti-racist education and intercultural education, and are somehow linked to the decolonial perspective by the influence of Catherine Walsh's thinking and her concept of "critical interculturality". With this author, the group has maintained dialogues, either through joint publication or through some type of exchange – such as Walsh's participation in events in Rio de Janeiro, for example.

In the context of these collaborations, the relations between critical interculturality and decolonial pedagogy were discussed by Catherine Walsh (2009) in a chapter of her authorship published in a book organized by Vera Candau, "*Educação intercultural na América Latina: entre concepções, tensões e propostas*". We consider this text to be one of the first sources of reflection on decoloniality to influence the Brazilian academic production in the field of Education.

In Pará state, Sônia Araújo's study (2010) is highlighted because of its pioneering nature on Rural Education in its relations with post-colonial debates. Although the study's is linked to "post-colonial" studies, the essay establishes an important dialogue with decolonial intellectuals. Moreover, starting with this publication, progressively, the studies carried out within the Research Group "José Veríssimo e o

Pensamento Educacional Latino-Americano” (UFPA), under Araújo’s coordination, began to give centrality to decolonial thought, with several works under her guidance addressing the construction of a genealogy of Latin American pedagogical thought in the 19th and 20th centuries (Mota Neto, 2013; Mota Neto; 2015; Viana, 2015; Lima, 2016).

Since the 2010s, therefore, and not only in these three Brazilian universities, but also in many others in all regions of the country, articles in journals, master's dissertations, doctoral theses, and essays presented in events’ proceedings have been deepening the decolonial debate in the field of Education. This has been applied to several of this Field’s thematic sub-areas, some of which stand out, such as popular education, ethnic-racial relations, Indigenous education, intercultural education, Latin American pedagogical thinking, among others.

We can thus assert that there is an effort by Brazilian researchers in the field of Education to break off with eurocentrism, westernism, and intellectual colonialism –all of them so present in the history of research in education in Brazil– dialoguing with coloniality-critical theoretical sources elaborated in Latin America itself, but also in the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. This is allied with a commitment to recognize the “sources” or “origins” of decolonial pedagogical thinking from black, Indigenous or third-world intellectuals, in addition to resistance social movements – these also being understood as spaces for decolonial knowledge production.

Particularly in the Amazon, theoretical and methodological efforts have been made to better understand the theme of decolonial pedagogies, and for this reason, in 2019, the *Rede de Pesquisa sobre Pedagogias Decoloniais na Amazônia* (RPPDA) was created, with three lines of investigation. These lines

are divided as: a) *decolonial pedagogical practices in the Amazon*, which investigates insurgent pedagogical practices arising from the resistance of socially subordinated groups/classes; b) *genealogy of decolonial pedagogical thought in the Amazon*, which proposes to investigate, in the history of Amazonian education, the construction of pedagogical thoughts of resistance to coloniality, produced not only by intellectuals from the academic sphere, but also by “intellectuals of the people”, social movement activists, popular educators, and social fighters; c) *decolonial pedagogies and intersectionalities in the Amazon*, which proposes to carry out studies on decolonial pedagogies and intersectionalities, articulating the education debate with feminist, anti-racist, gender, and sexuality perspectives, especially from the voices and struggles of social movements – crossing categories such as race, ethnicity, class, and others, all of them necessary to understand the Amazonian reality’s complexity.

Then there are RPPDA-linked researchers from various universities in the North Region of Brazil and several Master and Doctoral programs’ students participating in the Graduate Programs in Education at the Universidade do Estado do Pará and the Universidade Federal do Pará. They are building dissertations and theses in the area of Education with a decolonial focus.

In the debates that we have been promoting at RPPDA, an ever-present question concerns the theme of this text – *the challenges of educational research from a decolonial perspective*. It is evident that an epistemological turn must be present in the dissertations and theses produced, but this turn also presupposes an inventive and transgressive capacity in the research methodologies used, in the knowledge production processes, in the relationship between

researchers and their interlocutors in the field, in the produced data's analysis strategies, and in the ethical care that presupposes an investigation in a decolonial perspective.

Thus, the objective of this work is to contribute to the debate on the challenges of educational research from a decolonial perspective. We take on this task of reflection in order to analyze what we have read and thought about the subject, and also to systematize what we have accomplished in our research or what we have followed in terms of research under our guidance and that of other colleagues linked or not to the RPPDA. Therefore, even if signed by two people, this text is marked by a dialogical polyphony, in which many subjects print their voices: Latin American intellectuals from the decolonial perspective, Brazilian and Amazonian researchers of Education, black feminists, original populations from the Amazon, and others.

The text emphasizes three challenges that we identified in educational research from a decolonial perspective: a) overcoming the pedagogical coloniality and Eurocentrism present in universities and in traditional knowledge production processes; b) assuming a participatory perspective and a political-transformative commitment towards the investigated social and educational realities; c) research education in dialogue with the experiences lived by subordinate subjects, their memories, ancestry, and wisdom.

At the same time that we present the main challenges identified, we also point out some strategies for facing or overcoming these challenges, suggested by intellectuals with whom we have dialogued or by ourselves, based on the research we have carried out, guided or accompanied. The challenges are not presented in order of importance, but follow a discursive logic in which we seek to analyze different

interrelated aspects of decolonial research in education.

Overcoming pedagogical coloniality and Eurocentrism present in universities and in traditional knowledge production processes

Recurring questions in debates that we have conducted are: how to do research in education with a decolonial perspective if our universities and their graduate programs continue to replicate the Eurocentric logic and the pedagogical coloniality that constitute them? Wouldn't the criteria usually used to validate knowledge on the qualification and defense boards for dissertations and theses not be overly colonialist to the point of rejecting knowledge production processes from a decolonial perspective? How can we decolonize the university and graduate programs if the presence of groups historically excluded from these spaces (Indigenous, quilombolas, black women, among others) remain restricted and the selection processes for entering the programs, in general, do not embrace affirmative action policies?

These issues seem to us extremely relevant and, in fact, constitute an urgent challenge to be faced: overcoming the pedagogical coloniality and the Eurocentrism of universities and graduate programs.

However, what is this pedagogical coloniality and how is it present in the university?

As it is known, one of the most important distinctions present in the decolonial debate is around the concepts of colonialism and coloniality. According to Restrepo and Rojas (2010), colonialism refers to the process and apparatus of political and military dominance that is employed to guarantee the exploitation of work and wealth in the colonies for the colonizer's benefit. Coloniality is a much more complex

historical phenomenon, which extends to the present and refers to a pattern of power that operates through the naturalization of territorial, racial, cultural, and epistemic hierarchies, enabling the replication of domination relations.

Since it is a complex phenomenon, different interconnected dimensions of coloniality have been analyzed by decolonial theorists, such as the coloniality of power, being, knowledge, gender, the cosmogonical-spiritual, alterity, and others. We understand that educational institutions play a fundamental role in the reproduction of coloniality and, therefore, we affirm that they operate, through pedagogical coloniality, subordinating the knowledge and life experiences of groups socially excluded by the modern/colonial world system. Furthermore, these institutions, such as westernized universities, implement a control regime not only of the knowledge produced, which only becomes considered valid if it is in accordance with the epistemic-methodological principles of modern Eurocentric science, but they also control whoever accesses these spaces, guaranteeing that the subordinated classes are excluded from them, by an extremely elitist logic, at the same time racist, patriarchal, sexist, and at the Market's service.

In this sense, one of the challenges for educational research from a decolonial perspective is to fight for effective democratization of the university and graduate programs. Black and indigenous scholars, for example, need to be present in these spaces, with their bodies, their struggles, wisdom, and ancestry to produce, from their own research, the knowledge that breaks with the current Eurocentrism. This does not mean, of course, that non-indigenous scholars cannot research indigenous education, for example. However, Indigenous researchers must take a leading role in the

processes of producing knowledge about their peoples, cultures, and educational processes.

The dialogue between knowledge that can be enhanced by the presence of these other subjects, will give rise to the construction of other pedagogies (Arroyo, 2012), challenging the traditional forms of knowledge production and allowing them to be disfigured, transfigured or reconfigured. This will require that university curricula start to incorporate, for example, black feminist intellectuals in their bibliographies, or Indigenous intellectuals, producing “fissures” in epistemologies, methodologies, and hegemonic curricula.

Grosfoguel (2016, p. 26), questioning the knowledge structure of westernized universities, based fundamentally on an epistemic racism/sexism, teases: “How is it possible that the canon of thought in all disciplines of Social Sciences and Humanities in westernized universities (Grosfoguel, 2012) is based on the knowledge produced by a few men from five countries in Western Europe (Italy, France, England, Germany, and the United States)?”

For him, in westernized universities, the knowledge produced by “other” epistemologies, cosmologies, and worldviews is considered “inferior” to the “superior” knowledge produced by a few westernized men from these five countries, forming the canon of thought in the Humanities and in the Social Sciences (Grosfoguel, 2016).

Education research, inserted in the field of Human and Social Sciences, has also systematically excluded these “other” epistemologies, cosmologies, and worldviews, which constitutes a challenge to be overcome by those who question the coloniality of universities.

According to Patricia Hill Collins (2019), black women have long asserted knowledge that challenges

the production of elite white men. However, as they have been denied access to positions of authority, they often resort to alternative knowledge validation processes.

Consequently, academic disciplines have usually rejected this knowledge. Added to this is the fact that credentials controlled by white academic men have always been denied to black women who use alternative standards, on the grounds that their work does not constitute legitimate research (Collins, 2019, p. 144).

In the educational field, black researchers such as Nilma Lino Gomes (2019) have demonstrated how pedagogical coloniality operates in Westernized universities, schools, and teaching and research institutions. For her, coloniality is the result of “imposition of colonial power and domination that manages to reach the subjective structures of a people, penetrating their concept of subject and extending to society in such a way that, even after the end of colonial rule, the bonds persist” (p. 227).

By emphasizing curriculum’s discussion, Gomes (2019) states that the Brazilian decolonial black perspective is one of those responsible for the process of decolonization of curricula and knowledge in Brazil. The author provides the black perspective of educational theory as part of Latin American decolonial production.

In this sense, we understand that one of the challenges for educational research from a decolonial perspective is to critically analyze both the reproduction of pedagogical coloniality through curricula, methodologies, teaching-learning processes, evaluation, didactic materials, and the effort to overcome this coloniality, carried out by black,

indigenous, quilombola, women, the LGBT+ community, and other groups historically excluded from formal spaces of knowledge production. Studying the trajectory and thinking of female black teachers, the performance of quilombola and Indigenous student associations, the impact of affirmative action policies, the struggle of social movements to decolonize the university, are all possibilities that are part of the challenge highlighted.

An important research agenda can be established around this challenge, which also has implications for the history of education, which needs to be rewritten based on the voices, struggles, and realities of socially subordinated groups. If the official history is an artifact that operates by reproducing elitist, racist, patriarchal, and sexist narratives, a History of Education in a decolonial perspective may be able to help us reread the events that have historically marked education, from an “other” view, much more critical of processes of exclusion and oppression, breaking with the “discursive normality”, the “consensus perspective” and the “imperial voice” that preside over the traditional writing of the history of education.

Historiographic efforts are needed to trace the genealogies of Latin American, Brazilian, and Amazonian pedagogical thinking. An example of excellent work of this type are the books “Fontes da Pedagogia Latino-Americana: uma antologia”, organized by Streck (2010) and “Fontes da Pedagogia Latino-Americana: heranças de(s)coloniais”, organized by Streck; Morretti and Adams (2019). We need to move further in this direction, mapping unknown educational thinkers, insurgent educational experiences, and decolonial pedagogical productions.

Assuming a participatory perspective and a political-transformative commitment when faced with the investigated social and educational realities

Revealing the reproduction mechanisms of pedagogical coloniality is fundamental, but not enough in research on education from a decolonial perspective. This research, seeking to break away from the positivist structure of modern science, is also characterized by taking on the researcher's political-transformative commitment in the face of the social and educational realities investigated.

According to Grosfoguel (2016), the subject x object division and the neutrality myth, which produces a supposedly "impartial" knowledge, not conditioned by the body or by the location in the space of the person who elaborates it, remains a criterion used for knowledge validation of disciplines at westernized universities.

In the same direction, Patricia Collins (2019), citing positivism as one of the classic paradigms of modern Western thought, states that there are several requirements that need to be met for knowledge to be considered valid, according to this Westernized perspective. First, research methods require a distance between the researcher and his/her "object" of study. A second requirement is the exclusion of emotions from the research process. Third, it is considered that ethics and values should not have a place in research.

This Eurocentric epistemology, which guides traditional investigative processes in which the subject x object dichotomy is present, as well as the lack of commitment to the investigated realities, is confronted with the principles of black feminist epistemology, for example, and certainly with other epistemologies produced by social groups subordinated by

modernity/coloniality. Referring to black feminist epistemology, Collins (2019, p. 147) asserts:

Many black women have had access to another epistemology, which encompasses patterns for arriving at the truth that are widely accepted by African American women. Black feminist epistemology is founded on experimental and material basis, such as collective experiences and corresponding worldviews that American black women have consolidated from their peculiar history. The historical working conditions of black women, both in black civil society and in the exercise of paid labor, gave rise to a series of experiences that, once shared and transmitted, formed the collective wisdom from the point of view of black women. In addition, a range of principles for assessing real claims is available to those who have shared such experiences. Such principles sedimented the wisdom of black women in a general nature and further consolidated what I call black feminist epistemology here (p. 147).

In this sense, as evidenced by black feminist epistemologies, the sharing of knowledge and experiences marks the knowledge production process of black women. Producing knowledge is not an isolated attitude, with the pretense of neutrality, but a collective experience, of daily, shared learning, in order to critically understand society and education, and engaging in their transformation.

For Collins (2019), black American women considered that, "since knowledge derives from experience, the best way to understand someone else's ideas would be developing empathy and sharing experiences that led them to form such ideas" (p 151).

For her, this particular socialization process encourages particular forms of knowledge.

This author also tells us about the use of dialogue to evaluate knowledge. “A primary assumption that underlies the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge is that connections, not separations, are an essential component of the knowledge validation process” (Collins, 2019, p. 153). She further states that such a belief in connections and the use of dialogue as a criterion of methodological adequacy has African origins, in oral traditions inherited from Africa and in African-American culture. In this method, the fundamental prerequisite resides in an interactive network construction, in which there is active participation by all individuals.

Furthermore, we argue that those ideas confirmed as true by African-Americans, Latin-American lesbians, Asian-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other groups with their distinct points of view – with each group using epistemological approaches that constitute their unique positions – render truths more 'objective'. Each group speaks from its own point of view and shares its own partial and situated knowledge. However, as each group recognizes the partiality of its truth, the knowledge is unfinished. Each group becomes able to consider the other groups' points of view without waiving the uniqueness of its own point of view, or suppressing the partial perspectives of other groups (Collins, 2019, p. 166).

Therefore, this knowledge production process requires engagement, commitment, and a transforming attitude. The idea of “attitude”, by the way, has been pointed out as fundamental in the production of knowledge from a decolonial perspective. Maldonado-

Torres (2019) states that while the “method” defines the relationship between a subject and an object, the “attitude” refers to the subject's orientation in relation to knowledge, power, and being. The author concludes: “Thus, a change in attitude is crucial for a critical engagement against the colonality of power, knowledge, and being, and to put decoloniality as a project. The decolonial attitude is, therefore, crucial for the decolonial project and vice versa” (p. 45).

From the history of Latin American social thinking were born some of the most important contributions to a research that were critically engaged against colonialities and with a transformative attitude. We could not fail to mention the Participatory Action Research (PAR), systematized by the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda.

For Fals Borda, PAR is, at the same time, an *investigation method*, an *educational technique*, and a *political action*. It is not just investigating, nor just educating, nor just acting. It is a triad permeated by a *life philosophy*, which saturates it as a whole, and with which society could be rebuilt as a new force. PAR is, therefore, a methodology within an experiential process (Fals Borda and Zamosc, 1985).

Emphasizing the experiential aspect, Fals Borda and Rahman (1989) defined PAR as an open process of life and work, a progressive experience towards the structural transformation of society and culture, a process that requires commitment, an ethical stance, and persistence at all levels. Combining scientific research with political action, PAR aims to radically transform social and economic reality, and build popular power for the benefit of excluded groups. In this complex process are included popular education, the situations' diagnosis, critical analysis, and practice as sources of knowledge to probe problems, needs, and dimensions of reality (Fals Borda, 1985).

The final purposes of PAR, according to Fals Borda (1985), are: 1) to enable the classes and groups explored to effectively engender the transformative weight that corresponds to them, translated into concrete projects, works, fights, and developments; and 2) to produce and elaborate the socio-political thought proper to such popular bases. In his own words, Fals Borda (1998, p. 182) defined the PAR as follows:

a method of study and action that goes hand in hand with an altruistic philosophy of life to obtain useful and reliable results in the improvement of collective situations, especially for the working classes. It claims that the researcher bases his/her observations on coexistence with the communities, from which he/she also obtains valid knowledge. It is interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary and applicable in continuums that go from the micro to the macro of the studied universes (from groups to communities and large societies), but always without losing the existential commitment to the vital philosophy of changing that characterizes it.

From the above excerpt, we can define PAR as “a method of study and action” and “a philosophy of life”, which aims to “improve the life situation of the working classes”, and whose knowledge production is based “on interaction with the communities”, “interdisciplinarity or multidisciplinary” and “existential commitment” between the different investigation’s subjects.

PAR is a political-pedagogical experience, in the precise sense of popular education, insofar as it seeks to ideologically and intellectually arm the most exploited classes in society, so that they consciously assume their role as players in history. For Fals Borda (1978), this is the final destination of knowledge,

validated by praxis and guided by revolutionary commitment. Following the sense of popular education as a political-pedagogical process of organizing the working classes, Fals Borda (1985) considers PAR as a scientific method of productive work (and not just research), which implies organizing and promoting working classes' social movements, so that it is difficult and unproductive to distinguish between study and militancy.

For Fals Borda (2007), the general bases of PAR are as follows:

1. Search for an interdisciplinary science/knowledge centered on realities, contexts, and struggles, such as those of the tropics and subtropics.
2. Construction of a useful science/knowledge and at the service of working classes, seeking to free them from situations of exploitation, oppression, and submission.
3. Construction of techniques that ease the collective search for knowledge, of native peoples and other groups' critical recovery of their history and culture, and the systematic and easy-to-understand return to ordinary people of the acquired knowledge.
4. Mutually respectful search for knowledge between formal academic knowledge and informal wisdom and/or popular experience.
5. The researcher's personality/culture transformation to emphasize his/her personal experience and moral-ideological commitment to the struggle for radical change in society.

For Mota Neto (2016), this set of characteristics and motivations reveals three of the main decolonial marks present in the thinking of Fals Borda and his

investigative proposal, insofar as: a) they break the subject/object duality that characterizes knowledge in the modern scientific paradigm; b) they subvert the dichotomy between scientific knowledge and popular wisdom, which has been an ideological weapon of Eurocentric thought to determine the perceived ‘inferiority’ of the worldview of the working classes and other subordinated groups; c) they transcend evaluative neutrality and the lack of commitment to social transformation typical of the positivist sciences.

Therefore, we consider that the dialogical and collaborative perspectives of knowledge production proposed by black feminist epistemologies and the participatory and transformative commitment present in PAR are some of the most fruitful possibilities for knowledge production from a decolonial perspective.

Research education in dialogue with the experiences of subaltern subjects, their memories, ancestries and wisdoms

A fundamental challenge for researchers in the field of Education presupposes understanding it – education – beyond the official knowledge standardized by national curricular policies. This knowledge, as we have already seen, reproduces the Eurocentrism of westernized universities and schools, and places themselves in a position of non-dialogue – of superiority – over popular knowledge, insurgent wisdom, or the memories of social subjects subalternated by modernity/coloniality.

It is necessary, thus, that Education researchers open themselves to “other” pedagogies and “other” knowledge produced by popular communities, social movements, and native populations.

This debate is very present in black feminist epistemologies. Collins (2019), for example, tells us

about the lived experience as a signification criterion. “Living life as a black woman requires wisdom, since knowledge about the dynamics of intersected oppression is essential for black American women’s survival. When evaluating knowledge, African-American women give this wisdom great credibility” (p. 148).

Considering experience as a signification criterion and a fundamental epistemological principle of African-American thinking systems, Collins (2019) proposes the “narrative method”, which “requires that history be told, and not systematically dissected; reliable in what it has of most fundamental, and not ‘admired as a science’” (p. 150).

The narrative method, in educational research, presents itself as an important possibility of transgressing modern science, since knowledge considered socially “inferior” or “invalid”, such as popular culture or collective memories, comes to take over another epistemological status: as “valid”, “significant”, and “real” knowledge.

For Walsh (2013), collective memory has been the space where, in practice, the pedagogical and the decolonial are related. For this reason, the author states that decolonial pedagogy is related to the memories that indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, for example, have been maintaining as part of their existence and their fight. For her, collective memory articulates the continuity of a decolonial approach, it is like “this living of light and freedom in the midst of darkness” (2013, p. 26).

For Marín (2013), in the same understanding, projects and practices in the field of memory can be conceived within the horizon of decoloniality, for two reasons: first, by the visibility of *epistemes* that were subordinated by the logic of colonial power and by coloniality; second, because they mobilize dynamics for

the transformation of colonial legacies that still persist today.

This author calls *critical recovery of history* for this intellectual tradition, born in the late 1970s and implemented during the 1980s in Latin America, and which for her is one of the clearest antecedents in the configuration of critical political and epistemic scenarios in the collective memory field. The author points out that this tradition arises or “feeds” from the contributions of Participatory Action Research and Popular Education, under the decisive influence of Orlando Fals Borda and Paulo Freire (Marín, 2013).

Still according to Marín (2013), the collective recovery, according to Fals Borda and Freire, showed us the possibility of producing knowledge from the political and ethical praxis, as well as from the different knowledge logics within the popular sectors. As a result, “other” historical narratives began to be produced, which took on a dissident form in relation to the official ones, pointing to knowledge produced within the popular movement (Marín, 2013).

We can denominate this knowledge in several ways. In the Education Graduate Program at Universidade do Estado do Pará (PPGED-UEPA), in which there is a research line on “Cultural knowledge and education in the Amazon”, cultural knowledge can be conceptualized as “a unique form of the real’s intelligibility, rooted in culture, with roots in the warp of relationships with others, with which, certain groups creatively reinvent daily life, negotiate, create survival tactics, pass on their knowledge, and perpetuate their values and traditions” (Albuquerque and Sousa, 2016, p. 240).

This definition, developed by researchers at PPGED-UEPA, is linked to the efforts of other researchers in this Program, including the authors of this text, who since 2003 have been developing, in

theoretical and methodological terms, what we call “cartography of knowledge”. According to Oliveira (2018, p. 109), cartographies of knowledge “analyze the production and circulation of cultural knowledge, artistic-aesthetic knowledge, among others, in different educational contexts. Despite being able to focus on certain knowledge, the relationship between knowledges is affected by the daily practice of social practices. It is sought to map and understand the meaning of knowledges for the local culture’s population and education”.

Another way of conceptualizing these knowledges is found in Arias (2010), who talks about *insurgent wisdoms*. For him, valuing these wisdoms does not mean leaving aside the dialogue with the epistemologies that are built in the academy, nor failing to consider that these wisdoms have their own epistemology, as can be understood by academic knowledge. There is an epistemology, but these wisdoms go further, since they are anchored in the very lives of subordinated subjects and incorporate an “other” horizon of an ethical, political, and affective meaning. For this reason, these wisdoms, more than composing our study material, should be seen as sources of meaning, dialoguing on equal terms with critical epistemic proposals developed by scholars.

It is in this perspective that, learning from the insurgent wisdoms present for example in the ancestral traditions of Brazilian and Amazonian Afro-religious cultures, the differentiation between “knowledge” and “wisdom” is established by the *encantado*¹ (enchanted) Légua Boji². He was

¹ *Encantado* (enchanted) designates a spiritual entity generically called *caboclo* or *caboco*, and may represent, at a *Tambor de Mina*, the voduns and orisha, deities of this religion. For Eduardo Galvão (1976, p. 66), referring to the Amazon, the concept of *encantado* “is defined locally as a magical force attributed to the supernatural. Human beings, animals, and objects may be enchanted by the influence of a supernatural. The concept does not apply to Christian saints or deities”.

² In the *Terreiro* (worship place of Afro-Brazilian religions) researched, Légua Boji introduces himself as being over 500 years old and of Angolan origin. The historical *Postcolonial Directions in Education*, Vol. 9 No 2

incorporated in a preacher of a Tambor de Mina³ house, in Benevides town - Pará state in Brazil, and ethnographed in a previous piece of research by one of the authors of this text (Mota Neto, 2008). The differentiation is as follows:

Knowledge you learn from studying, it is something mechanical, you insist, insist, until you learn, and may later forget. Not wisdom, wisdom we learn from experience, life teaches us, we do not forget (Caboclo Légua Boji).

With this statement, Mr. Légua distinguishes two types of knowledge: formal knowledge, of methodical learning and of a bookish nature, disconnected from life and represented by school knowledge; and everyday knowledge, based on experience, in daily social relations, “knowledge that is learned, but not taught”, since it comes from the experience acquired over time.

In Tambor de Mina, the traditional knowledges are socialized from one generation to the next in direct communication relationships, in conversations, and in daily contact, using oral narratives that convey the collective memories of religion and the *povo-de-santo* (people-of-saint: people who worship orishas and voduns, African entities in Brazil). In this educational culture, the idea of *experience* is fundamental, since

narrative of this cabloco shows his departure from Africa, towards Trinidad and Tobago in Central America, and later coming to Brazil, where he appears as a cattle drover in the Codó forests, in Maranhão state, where the noble Dom Pedro Angaço adopted him as a son (Mota Neto, 2008).

³ More widespread denomination of Afro-Brazilians in Maranhão state and the Amazon rainforest region. The word “*Tambor*” (drum) derives from the importance of the homonymous musical instrument in worship rituals, and “*Mina*” (mine) derives from the African people of Costa da Mina. This name was given to slaves coming from the east coast of Castle of São Jorge de Mina, in the current Republic of Ghana, brought from the region of Togo, Benin, and Nigeria Republics, and who were known as *mina-jejes* and *mina-nagôs*. (Ferretti, 2000).

wisdom is acquired in daily religious practice, shaped by time (Mota Neto, 2008).

For Tramonte (2004), under the intercultural prism, the practices of Afro-Brazilian religions are presented as a hybrid field of identity construction. This field enables the creation and circulation of intercultural knowledge, which is preserved in religion due to the important role of preachers and other followers who, through oral speech, mythological narratives, counseling, and development work, socialize knowledge and traditions recorded in the *povo-de-santo's* collective memory.

In this sense, memory can be characterized as an essential source of knowledge in the Tambor de Mina's tradition, understanding tradition as a set of models, norms, patterns conveyed by memory and collective traditions, with the function of ordering day-to-day existence. For Zumthor (1997, p. 13), taking inspiration from Ortega y Gasset, tradition is "a collaboration that we ask our past to solve our current problems".

Therefore, the traditions' knowledges provide members of the *terreiro* community with elements to constitute their cultural and religious identity, with their own way of being, thinking, and acting on the world. The memory not only records the past episodes but also teaches, through the knowledge of tradition, ways of acting and explaining the current world. The preachers and the *encantados* are the main ones responsible for safeguarding such knowledge (Mota Neto, 2008).

Research on education and the wisdoms built in the Tambor de Mina brings up fundamental issues for research on education, such as the interculturality perspective, memories, ancestries, spirituality, corporeality, ecology, ethics, and aesthetics.

In our field experience, in addition to the “cartography of knowledge” already mentioned, the ethnographic perspective has been used. We believe that in research in education, ethnography is an important methodological strategy to study the wisdom, memories, ancestries, and life experiences of the working classes. We agree with Arias (2010) when he says that despite the colonial heritage that is the origin of Anthropology, nowadays this science has a great decolonizing potential, which can contribute to the fight against the dominant colonial reason.

Arias (2010) proposes a decolonial ethnography and, in his study, besides offering a wide theoretical discussion about what he calls “anthropology committed to life”, synthesized in the expression *corazonar*, also offers an interesting methodological reference for decolonial ethnographies realization, which may be well used by researchers on education. When referring the reader to Arias' own work, we just want to highlight one of decolonial ethnography's characteristics: *collaboration*, the need to build knowledge *with* people and not *about* them. It is necessary, therefore, to: “Being willing to collaborate with people, that is one of the best ways to earn their trust, it is from where that you have to try to join the community activities, help in collective work, [...] their parties, for example” (Arias, 2010, p. 367).

Decolonial ethnographies can also be called *collaborative*, as proposed by Mariateresa Muraca (2015), who conducted a study on popular, feminist, and decolonial pedagogical practices of the Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas de Santa Catarina (Movement of Peasant Women of Santa Catarina state). Muraca's work, in turn, is based on Lassiter's formulation (2005) on collaborative ethnography, which is characterized as dialogical and which puts at the center of the debate what, in general, remains only

a background, constantly consulting the research subjects throughout the knowledge production process.

Thus, we consider that narrative methods, processes of collective history recovery, studies on memory and oral history, the cartography of knowledge, and collaborative decolonial ethnographies offer rich possibilities for research in education.

Other (many) challenges

Since it is a new theme still, not widely addressed by researchers in the field of Education, the challenges of research from a decolonial perspective are many. These challenges have been presented in the very investigation process, carried out in our studies and by many others who have endeavored to investigate education with theoretical-methodological options and attitudes that are consistent with the epistemology of decoloniality. This is also a knowledge that is built collectively, collaboratively, and sometimes in networks.

If we want to decolonize science and research in education, we also need to change our strategies for knowledge production and socialization, avoiding academic exclusivity and the frantic search for status through the investigations and publications that we develop. On the contrary, the research exercise needs to be increasingly dialogical, collaborative, in solidarity, accurate, done with academic commitment, solidarity/sorority ethics, and carried out with a transformative feeling and affectivity.

Doing research in Education from a decolonial perspective implies, in fact, incorporating sensitivity and ethical commitment in investigations. Collins (2019) tells us about the ethics of care as constitutive of black feminist epistemologies. “The theme of

speaking from the heart touches the ethics of care, another dimension of an epistemological alternative used by African-American women [...] the ethics of care suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the process of knowledge validation" (p. 156).

For the author, emotion, subjectivity, life stories, ethics, and reason are connected and are essential components of the search for knowledge. "In this alternative epistemology, values are located at the center of the knowledge validation process, so that investigations always point to an ethical objective." (Collins, 2019, p. 160).

Orlando Fals Borda, in the same direction, speaks about the popular educator and the participatory researcher as a *senti-pensante* (sensing/thinking, empathetic) intellectual, that is, "that person who tries to combine the mind with the heart, to guide life along the good path and endure its many obstacles". It, therefore, evokes the possibility of another educator and researcher profile, in direct opposition to the cold and supposedly 'neutral' attitude of the positivist, traditional, and Eurocentric scientist.

Since Participatory Action Research develops in experiential processes, Fals Borda spoke of the alterity construction and of dialogue in the search for knowledge. "When we discover ourselves in other people, we affirm our own personality, our own culture and we harmonize with a vivified cosmos" (Fals Borda and Rahman, 1989, p. 20). On another occasion, Fals Borda (1998) defined altruism as a "Polar Star", endowed with subversive potential in this decomposed contemporary world.

These reflections are able to guide investigative processes anchored in ethics. They also allow us to raise debates about the ethical procedures that we have used in our work and about the current ethics

committees that analyze our projects and those of our advisors. Are we being able to build research based on an ethics of solidarity, committed to communities and careful with people, affections, knowledge, and nature? Or are we just following bureaucratic protocols, created by researchers in tune with the modern science paradigm? How can we cause cracks in these westernized structures that significantly shape ethics committees and procedures?

Another challenge that seems fundamental to us is to take on corporeality in the knowledge production processes. Paulo Freire (1987) talked about the human being as a *conscious body*, whose conscience is intended for the world. He said that human beings, "because they are a 'conscious body', live a dialectical relationship between conditioning and their freedom" (1987, p. 90).

To take on corporeality is also to face the Eurocentric science model, which is intended to be disembodied and without geopolitical location, according to Bernadino-Costa; Maldonado-Torres and Grosfoguel (2019). "The decolonial project takes on the need to assert the body-geopolitics for knowledge production as a strategy to defuse this 'cultural bomb' that Wa Thiong'o talks about" (Kenyan writer) (p. 13).

Maldonado-Torres (2019) talks about the *open body* as a questioning and creative body.

The open body is a questioning as well as a creative body. Artistic creations are ways of criticism, self-reflection, and proposition of different ways of conceiving and living time, space, subjectivity, and community, among other areas. [...] Decolonial aesthetic performance is, among other things, a ritual that seeks to keep the body open, as a continuous source of questions. At the same time, this open

body is a body prepared to act (Maldonado-Torres, 2019, p. 48).

In addition, according to the author, when the wretched (reference to Frantz Fanon's book *The Wretched of the Earth*) communicates the critical issues that are based on the open body's lived experience, another discourse and another way of thinking emerge. For this reason, writing is for many Black and Colored intellectuals a fundamental event. Writing is a way of rebuilding oneself and a way of combating the effects of ontological separation and metaphysical catastrophe (Maldonado-Torres, 2019).

A decolonial sensitive writing also seems to be a challenge to be taken up in research in education. The academic rigor inherited from positivism taught us to write in an "objective", "disembodied", "cold" way. Patriarchy taught us to write only in the masculine, hiding and subordinating the place of women in intellectual history. Racism drifted from us words that reproduce racial asymmetries. Capitalism imposes a marketing, utilitarian, technical vocabulary on us. It takes courage, *an open body*, a willingness to learn, and daring to be able to build other writings that are more sensitive and inclusive.

Writing is a complex action, as are the other ways of expressing oneself about the world (painting, sculpting, and poetizing) because they are ways of creating, ways of giving meaning to the world – and for those who historically have had this right subtracted, such as subalternized populations (black, indigenous, working class, women), starting to write about their history and the meaning of life is a painful but necessary act of freedom.

The feeling of demand and the lack of response that Anzaldúa reveals when writing, especially for women in the Third World, are far beyond gender. It is

also a historical-cultural feeling. She leads us to reflect when she wonders:

Who has given us permission to practice the act of writing? Why does writing seem so artificial to me? I do anything to postpone this act: I empty the trash, answer the phone. A voice is recurring in me: Who am I, a poor chicana at the end of the world, to think I could write? How did I dare to become a writer while crouching in the tomato fields, bending under the scorching sun, numb in an animal lethargy by the heat, swollen and callused hands, inadequate to hold the quill? (2000, p.231)

For the author, writing is an act of recreating the world in which we live. It is denouncing that this current system is unable to meet the needs of human lives; writing is also an act of announcing. Writing is an act of alchemy, of creating a soul, of seeking oneself at the center of human existence, of deconstructing the imposed “other”. In this construction, the subject who is born is no less fearful, but is a more courageous and determined person to write the following words:

Because the world I create in writing makes up for what the real world does not give me. In writing, I put order in the world; I put a handle on it so to be able to hold it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and my hunger. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the badly written stories about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and with you. To discover myself, preserve myself, build myself, and achieve autonomy (Anzaldúa, 2000, p.232).

Finally, a challenge that seems to be fundamental is to consider intersectionality as a methodological

perspective of decolonial research. We need to overcome our Cartesian tendency to separate and prioritize categories and processes of oppression. The reality, in this perspective, is like a square with other small squares inside. Each dimension of reality, society, and education fits within a specific grid. When these dimensions communicate, it is in a dichotomous and hierarchical perspective.

This means that in our research we reproduce this Cartesian logic and build isolated, dichotomous categories that, instead of allowing a more complex view of society and education, reduce reality to linear, schematic, and reductionist processes.

In decolonial thinking, there is a heterarchical view of society and the oppression processes. Even when emphasizing, for example, the role of racism in the organization of modern domination relations, it is not intended for racism to explain everything, or to be explained without analyzing other intersecting oppression processes. Let us see Grosfoguel's position (2019, p. 59-60) in this respect:

In the decolonial perspective, racism organizes modern domination relations, maintaining the existence of each domination hierarchy without reducing one to the other, but at the same time without being able to understand one without the others. The principle of complexity is as follows: one hierarchy of domination as an epiphenomenon cannot be reduced to another that determines it in the 'last resort', but neither can one understand a hierarchy of domination without the others. This principle of complexity is what Aníbal Pinto (1976) called a 'historical-structural heterogeneity', Kyriakos Kontopoulos (1993) called 'heterarchy', and black feminists call 'intersectionality'.

Indeed, for black feminists, such as Collins (2019), the recognition of the intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation seeks to outline an alternative paradigm that may constitute an important part of black feminist epistemology.

The Black Collective Manifesto (1982) was of fundamental importance for constructing other interpretations, since the articulation of other ethnic groups exploited and violated in the process of conquering territories in the global south by Europeans and, later, the United States, shows the differences of gender, women, and culture. These cannot be limited within a theoretical standard of white women and of universal dimension, concealing the differences of all social orders. For the authors Brah (2006), Collins (2019), and Hulko (2009), to name a few, there is a need for articulating different theoretical categories to show that oppression is combined, in other words, intersected/intertwined in the web of complexity that is life.

For the author Audre Lorde (2009), there is no oppression hierarchy, because intolerance, difference, and oppressive violence happen in all shapes, sizes, colors, sexualities, genders, and others. For her, establishing hierarchies of importance in oppressions is to establish a division in the liberation process, which compromises the collective emancipatory horizon. When hierarchizing oppressions, it is as if we were to place an oppressed group against others, that is to say, yet another cynical attack by the dominant system that has competitiveness as its principle.

The growing attacks on lesbians and gay men are just an introduction to the growing attacks on Black people, wherever they are, this country's oppression manifestos in themselves have Black

people as potential victims. And this is the banner of right-wing cynicism, to encourage members of oppressed groups to act against each other, and for so long people have been divided because of our particular identities that we cannot all join together in effective political action. Within the lesbian community, I am Black, and within the Black community, I am a lesbian. Any attack on Black people is a lesbian and gay issue because hundreds of other Black women and I are part of the lesbian community. Any attack on lesbians and gays is a Black issue because hundreds of lesbians and gay men are Black. There are no hierarchies of oppression (Lorde, 2009, p. 02).

When thinking about the non-hierarchy of oppressions, this leads us to understand that they are intersectionalized and interwoven, but that it does not mean, either, an imprisonment. For Davis (2016), intersectionality does not produce a normative straitjacket to monitor, test, and inspect compliance with the normalized standards, trying to maintain an exact and correct line; on the contrary, it promotes academic encouragement, especially feminist, to become critically involved with its own hypotheses, taking into account the interests of a reflective, critical, and responsible feminist investigation.

Conclusion

The reflections shared in this text are intended to be a contribution to the debate on decolonial epistemologies and research methodologies in the field of Education. This field, like the others in the Humanities and Social Sciences, is marked by the historic reproduction of *intellectual colonialism*, as Orlando Fals Borda said, or *coloniality of knowledge*, in the most contemporary

decolonial grammar. In Brazil, as well as in other Latin American countries, we know little about our own thinking path. The colonialities of knowledge and being, always articulated, have been working towards the denial of human existences, therefore, their knowledge; as well as promoting epistemicide and, through it, the human being's ontological dimension as a knowledge builder, is also annihilated.

The decolonial attitude is an explicit refusal of colonialities in their various facets. It mobilizes thoughts and bodies to rise up against oppression. At the intellectual level, it provokes a debate about the need to invest efforts in the originality and creativity of our thought, which also needs to be critical and transformative.

Achille Mbembe (2017) says that we live in a time when history and things are turning to us, and when Europe is no longer the gravitational center of the world. This is the fundamental experience of our time. This is a provocative statement. Even if we may disagree with it, the statement causes us to assume the usurped place of knowledge producer and to attribute legitimacy to what we do, what we propose, and what we think. Usurpation and legitimacy, as Albert Memmi (2007) taught us, are procedures used by the colonizer to discredit and hide the colonized. 'How can usurpation try to pass for legitimacy?' asked Memmi. And he gave the answer: "Two procedures seem possible: to demonstrate the usurper's eminent merits, so eminent that they ask for a reward like this; or to insist on the usurped ones' demerits, so profound that they can only provoke such a misfortune" (p. 90). Consequently, "The usurper's restlessness, his thirst for justification, requires him, at the same time, to lift himself up into the clouds, and to sink the usurped one under the ground" (p. 90).

Then, out of the underground, we go. Better yet, that with the land, the forests, and the waters with which men and women in the Amazon, for example, build their way of life and their insurgent wisdoms, we can unlearn repetition and we can exercise creation.

On this journey, we are going to face many challenges. It is not going to be an easy task to decolonize our thought, daily life, and the world in which we live. However, if we believe that science and education can contribute to overcoming colonialities, then we need to do science in line with the principles that move us.

Unlearning the westernized and colonial/modern way of doing research is going to imply, in our view: a) overcoming the pedagogical coloniality and Eurocentrism present in universities and in traditional knowledge production processes; b) the assumption of a participatory perspective and a political-transformative commitment when facing the investigated social and educational realities; c) an exercise in researching education that dialogues with the subaltern subjects' experiences, their memories, ancestry, and wisdom. It will also imply, among many other challenges, incorporating sensitivity and ethical commitment in investigations, taking on the corporeity of knowledge production processes, producing sensitive and decolonial writing, and considering intersectionality as a methodological perspective of decolonial research.

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